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UNCLAS PRAGUE 000148

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NCE, EUR/ERA AND EB/TPP/MTA
COMMERCE FOR 4232/ITA/MAC/MROGERS
USDA FOR BEVERLY SIMMON, BIOTECH GROUP
STATE PASS USTR FOR LERRION
USEU FOR KVIEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ETRD](#) [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECH REPUBLIC TO SUPPORT MON863 BIOTECH CORN
APPROVAL IN EU COUNCIL

1. On January 26, Embassy economic officer and agricultural specialist met with Karel Blaha, the Director of the Department of Environmental Risks at the Ministry of Environment. Blaha is the Czech official most involved in European Union rulemaking on issues affecting the environment such as biotech and chemicals regulation. We visited Blaha after a meeting with the local representative of Monsanto in the Czech Republic.

2. Blaha said that at the EU regulatory committee meeting in October 2004 the Czech Republic abstained from the vote to approve MON863. However, he said that he and the Czech Republic have consistently favored approval because the scientific studies do not show any convincing evidence of danger to humans or animals from consumption of MON863. The GOCR's abstention was a tactic, because it was clear that the approval would not pass in the regulatory committee vote. Blaha was concerned that a yes vote by the Czech Republic might force other countries to cast a no vote and become entrenched in that position. At the next Council vote, he intends for Minister of Environment Libor Ambrozek to vote in favor of approval.

3. Blaha remarked that he is disappointed that politics is playing such a large role in the debate over GMO approvals. The GOCR will vote yes in the Council on MON863 in part to make a statement that the decision should be based on scientific, not political, principles. He noted that after its change of government, Spain reversed course on MON863, and that Hungary also seems to be changing its attitudes away from support for biotech. Poland, with its large agricultural base, has been careful and mostly abstained in EU votes on the issue, he noted. A country's stance on biotech should not be affected by a change in its government, Blaha concluded.

4. We discussed the status of the REACH chemicals regulation with Blaha. He said that the issue is attracting much more attention within the EU, and he was surprised by the crowds of people that attended the last working group session on it. He expects there to be as many as nine working group meetings in early 2005 that he will have to attend. The Czech "tripartita" -- the Council of Economic and Social Agreement composed of representatives of business, labor and government -- has warned the government of the potential loss of employment the regulation could cause. Blaha reiterated that the GOCR is in favor of the British-supported concept of "one substance, one registration".
CABANISS